

T H E
M E T H O D S
To be taken by 702.96
108
M I N I S T E R S
F O R T H E
Revival of Religion

Consider'd, in a
D I S C O U R S E
O N
R E V. III. 2.

By *DAVID SOME.* *K.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for RICHARD HETT, *at the Bible and*
Crown in the Poultry, near Cheapſide.

M DCC XXX.

(Price 6d.)

METHODS

MINISTERS

Revival of Religion

DISCOURSE

REV. III. 2.

BY D. D. D. D.

LONDON:

Printed for RICHARD HART, at the Bible and
Crown in the Portico, near Chancery.
M DCC XXXI.

(Printed by)

THE PREFACE.

THE declining state of religion, engaged the United Ministers of several congregations of Protestant Dissenters in publick addresses to God, to direct and succeed their endeavours for the revival of it. The substance of the following Discourse was delivered at one of those solemn seasons.

I am sufficiently aware, that the hints I have given in favour of Liberty, will not be acceptable to them who complain of it as the source of the evils which now threaten us, and desire to have it restrained rather than enlarged; and they who consider Christianity as a refined System of Morality, and not as an institution designed to recover fallen man, and bring him to GOD, will dislike many things in these papers. It will not surprize me, if persons in these different ways of thinking should agree in censuring of them.

There was lately published, An Enquiry into the causes of the decay of the Dissenting Interest: The principles of that Author are generous, and some of his remarks useful: But, all things

The PREFACE.

considered, some further attempts seem necessary for the support of that cause. Whether the methods I have proposed are proper, and will be of service for that purpose, is with great deference submitted to the judgment of every impartial Reader.

I am fully persuaded that in our present circumstances, a separation from the National Establishment is of high importance to Christianity, and would by no means encourage any thing in Protestant Dissenters which should be corrected and reformed, or which may disgust persons of a better taste, who are well affected to religion, and occasion their leaving of them: But we cannot reasonably expect much success, in an undertaking where great numbers are concerned, if the temper and sentiments of many among them be entirely neglected.

REV.

REV. III. 2.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.

WHSOEVER will impartially consider the nature of Christianity, must certainly allow, that it is admirably calculated for the reformation of the world. It might well be expected, that this divine institution should have a powerful influence on the hearts and lives of those who embrace it; that it should triumph over the irregularities of the mind, and dispose men to a chearful discharge of their duty to God, and to each other.

These happy effects were most remarkably produced by the *Religion of Jesus*, when it made its first appearance in the world. The primitive Christians were excellent persons: There was a dignity and glory in their conduct, ^a *becoming the children of God, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom they did shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.* And the consequence was, that when ^b *others saw their good works, they glorified their Father in heaven, and falling down before the lustre of their bright examples,* ^c *were compelled to acknowledge, that God was in them of a truth.* Nay, it engaged them to receive Christianity as well as to applaud it, and was one considerable occasion of its surprising propagation in the world.

But things did not long continue in this agreeable posture; ^d *the gold became dim, and the fine gold changed.* The disciples of the Son of God began ear-

^a Phil. ii. 15, 16.

^b Mat. v. 16.

^c 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

^d Lam. iv. 1.

ly to neglect the precepts he had given them; they were soon carried away with the iniquity of the times, and yielded a guilty and shameful compliance, to the vain customs, and sinful manners of the world about them.

This was the case of the Christians at *Sardis*. *They had a name to live, but were dead.* They maintained the form of godliness, but were extremely deficient *in the power of it.* It does not appear from what is here mentioned, that the faith which they profess'd was corrupted with errors, that their worship was sullied with superstition, or their peace disturbed with contentions and divisions. There are no complaints against them upon these accounts, they had the reputation of an honourable and flourishing church, and all things went well among them, so far as human observation could reach. But the Redeemer, *whose eyes are as a flame of fire,* *who searcheth the reins and hearts,* *he knew their works,* and had not found them perfect before God. He looked upon them but as a fair corpse, when the animating soul is departed from it. The greatest part of them had *defiled their garments;* their temper and their behaviour were not so holy and regular as they had formerly been. Vital and practical religion was at a very low ebb, and that which was left in their church was just expiring. This gave occasion to the important exhortation in the text, *be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*

The Epistle of which these words are a part, was directed to the *Angel* (or pastor) of the church at *Sardis*. He had the over-sight of the flock, and was in a particular manner concern'd in what was written to them. It was incumbent upon him to attend to it himself, to propose it to those under his care, and it was their duty to regard the instructions contained in it.

^c Rev. iii. 1.

^d ii. 23.

^e 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^f iii. 1, 2.

^g Rev. i. 14.

^h iii. 4.

ⁱ iii. 1.

In this view I shall discourse upon this subject, and consider this address to one particular minister, as that which by a parity of reason, is applicable to others in the like office, and the like circumstances. It is a charge given, by the *supreme Head of the church*, to all ministers, which indispensably obligeth them, to do their utmost for the revival of religion, when it is sinking and dying among their people.

It is, alas, too evident, that this is our present case. Our religious interests have an uncomfortable aspect: When we attentively survey them, we shall see much to lament, and more to fear.

Great breaches have been made in several congregations, and *the gates of the grave* have of late prevailed much against us. Many who were *pillars in the temple of the Lord*, the ornaments and the supports of their respective societies, are laid in the dust, and few of those who survive inherit their piety, or their zeal. The attendance of some on publick worship is so inconsistent, and so trifling, that we have great reason to fear, that family prayer, the private methods of religious instruction, and the exercises of secret devotion, are either wholly omitted, or performed in a very cold and formal manner. The sacred obligations of sobriety and temperance, justice and charity, are openly violated by others; and those who are free from such scandalous practices, discover little of a heavenly temper, or of a generous concern for the publick good: They are eagerly pursuing the business or the pleasures of this animal life, and *seek only their own things, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*. And what is still more lamentable, we are sunk into such a consummate stupidity, as to be insensible of our unhappy circumstances. *P Grey hairs are upon us*, the tokens of decay, and the fore-runners of death, *and we know it not*; the life and power of godliness de-

^m Mat. xvi. 18.

^p Hos. vii. 9.

^q Rev. iii. 12.

^o Phil. ii. 21.

clines apace, and there are scarce any to be found who seriously lay it to heart.

But I would hope, and I do believe, that you my *reverend Brethren* are deeply impressed with the present posture of our spiritual affairs, and are deliberately considering which way you may retrieve them. Methinks I hear you inquiring, with a zeal and tenderness becoming those who are *seeking the welfare of Israel*, * *By whom shall Jacob arise, for he is small?* This emboldens me to use the greatest freedom and plainness, in offering you my thoughts on this important subject. May God direct to the most proper methods, assist us in our attempts, and may his good Spirit add efficacy to all.

In this confidence, and with this dependence, I would humbly propose the following advices :

I. We should have a constant regard to the frame and temper of our own spirits.

Providence hath made it our stated business to take care of the concerns of religion ; and though it may seem much for our advantage, to be constantly employed in such excellent work, yet if we are not upon our guard, our privilege will become a snare. We may possibly degenerate so far, as to regard the sacred offices of our ministerial profession, just as others do the affairs of a secular calling ; and may conclude that we have acquitted ourselves well, when we have decently passed through the usual forms of divine service.

But if the temper of our minds be neglected, it will be attended with the most fatal consequences. An allowed formality is inconsistent with sincerity ; and if this prevail in us we shall have reason to fear, *that after we have preached to others, we ourselves shall be cast away.* This will be the miserable lot of those who have trifled with the awful solemnities of divine wor-

* Neh. ii. 10.

† Amos vii. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ship; * they only compass themselves about with sparks of their own kindling, and shall at last lie down in sorrow. And if we be sincere Christians, superficial services will rob us of that noble pleasure which would attend a more lively discharge of our duty, and give us a great deal of perplexity and uneasiness in the review; so that if we are concerned either for our own safety, or comfort, it should be our care, that the vigour of religion be kept up in our hearts.

I would further recommend this, as what is of the utmost importance to our publick usefulness. It is probable that our people will imbibe the temper and spirit which appears in us. This is so obvious a remark, that it is become a proverb; *v* like people, like priest. If we are stupid and unaffected, it will abate the energy of our addresses, and at once be the cause and the excuse, of the like languor and insensibility in them. But if our heart be filled with vital religion, it will have a happy influence on all our ministrations. Our prayers and our sermons will be tinged with it. *W* Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. When grace is in exercise within, *x* it will be poured into our lips, and *y* many gracious words will proceed from us. If the *z* Holy Ghost dwelleth in us, and assists us, we shall lead and guide spiritual worshippers, in presenting seasonable and proper petitions to God, and the divine warmth and fervency of our own souls, will be a means to kindle the like holy fire in theirs: And when we are *a* declaring the counsel of God *b*, our doctrine will drop as the rain, our speech will distil as the dew, as the small rain on the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: The consolations designed for those *c* who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, will gently insinuate themselves into their minds, *d* and fill them

* Isa. l. 11.

v Hos. iv. 9.

w Mat. xii. 34.

x Psal. xlv. 2.

y Luke iv. 22.

z Rom. viii. 9.

a Acts xx. 27.

b Deut. xxxii. 2.

c Heb. vi, 18.

d Rom. xv. 13.

with joy and peace in believing. And if we partake of that *° Spirit* which God gave *without measure* to his Son, whom he sent to speak his words, we shall then *† teach with authority*; our instructions will be delivered with an elevation suitable to our character, and our people will not only hear, but they will also feel the weight of our admonitions.

There is something in the performances of some ministers, which strangely impresses their pious hearers. Though their discourses be destitute of the ornaments of language, yet they *‡ who are born of God* find a sweetness in them, which is incomparably beyond that which ariseth from elegant phrases, and harmonious periods. That which appears low and flat to the taste of many, affords the experienced Christian such an inward and sublime pleasure, as is not to be found in the highest strains of the most pompous eloquence. Happy *§ the men of God*, who have this divine unction which so powerfully attracts devout souls, whose relish is formed by conversing with heaven. They are like Aaron the high-priest, when he was consecrated to his office; the holy oil which was *¶ poured on his head*, in so abundant a quantity, that it flowed down to the skirts of his garments, was grateful to all who were about him. So when these anointed ones come forth to minister, a sweet perfume, and a divine fragrancy diffuseth itself through the whole assembly, and is delightfully perceived, by all those who *‡ have their senses spiritually exercised*.

The advanced piety of our fathers in the ministry, did eminently conduce to their remarkable success. The *Memoirs* which we have of the lives of several of them, manifest their great attainments in vital and inward religion; and I fear we shall never recover the dying interests of Christianity, 'till that be found in us, which render'd them so signally useful in their generation.

° John iii. 34.

† Mat. viii. 29.

‡ John i. 13.

§ 2 Tim. iii. 17.

¶ Ps. cxxxiii. 2.

‡ Heb. v. 14.

I have heard it observed by some, who are in a way of thinking different from us, that our publick administrations are managed with greater propriety and exactness, than they were in the days of our predecessors. And without suspicion of flattery, I can congratulate the rising generation of ministers among us, with the great improvements they have made, in the method and style of their performances. But if the form and order of them is better, I am afraid the temper of our minds is worse; and since the ministers of the last age did so much good with their unpolished addresses, and we so little with our neater composures, one would think this might fully convince us, that *a savour of the things that be of God* is of much greater importance to a minister of the Gospel, than that politeness which is now so much admired and affected. It is happy, indeed, when both these meet in the same person, but instances of this are very rare. Every pious preacher cannot deliver himself with elegance and exactness; and accurate method and beautiful language, are not always animated and supported by real devotion. We should therefore divide our work, and prepare our hearts as well as lips for the services of the sanctuary, and endeavour after seriousness of spirit, which will more effectually recommend our labours to enlighten'd minds, than *excellency of speech, or the enticing words of man's wisdom.*

II. We should not only *take heed unto ourselves*, but also *to our doctrine*, that our preaching may have the most direct tendency to do good.

Upon this head I cannot but advise, that sublime speculations and abstruse controversies, should not ordinarily be introduced into our sermons. These *minister questions rather than godly edifying.* Christianity

¹ Mat. xvi. 23.

² 1 Cor. ii. 4.

³ 1 Tim. iv. 16.

⁴ Ib. i. 4.

is a *doctrine according to godliness, and not a strife about words*. It is an easy matter to engage our warmer hearers in disputes on subjects, which neither they, nor we can fully understand; and the most unfit for such work, are generally the most forward to enter into it. I allow, it is the ready way to procure the regards of those, who lay a mighty stress upon their own opinions, but their esteem will be purchased at too dear a rate, since instead of promoting true religion, it will most certainly destroy it. *P Where this zeal and contention is, there is confusion, and every evil work*. Some may possibly admire it for its shining lustre, but too fatal experience proves it to be a raging flame and a devouring fire, and wherever it breaks out, there is reason to fear, that practical godliness will soon be consumed. The thoughts and the discourses of Christians, will be so entirely swallowed up by the matters in debate, that things of the greatest moment will be disregarded by them; and their tempers will be so embitter'd against each other, that charity itself, the *greatest of all graces*, will perhaps be counted a crime.

We live in an age, in which all advantages will be taken against Christianity: And our pulpit skirmishes have made sport for unbelievers, and furnished them with matter for banter and ridicule. By these we have given them occasion to say, *'the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad. 'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, why should the uncircumcised, the infidels triumph?* Happy would it be for us, if those instances of our weakness and folly were buried in everlasting oblivion, that they might no more be mentioned to our disgrace, nor improved to the prejudice of that excellent religion which we profess. Let us walk in *'a plain path because of our enemies*, and act the wiser part for the time to come, and employ

P *☞* Jam. iii. 16.

☞ 2 Sam. i. 20.

☞ 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

☞ Ps. xxvii. 11.

☞ Hos. ix. 7.

our sacred hours, in considering those important subjects, which cannot be omitted, without the greatest injury to the souls of our people.

Our first attempts should be to impress their minds, with a deep and an abiding sense of the pollution and misery of that estate into which they are fallen by sin. Here true conversion begins; *"the whole need not the physician, but those who are sick, and Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* Men will never be concerned about the renovation of their natures, 'till they see the depravity of them; neither will they *"flee from the wrath which is to come,"* unless they apprehend they are *"become guilty before God,"* and so exposed to it.

This, by the blessing of God, will engage them to *"cry out, What shall we do to be saved?"* and dispose them to receive the *"good tidings of great joy,"* which the Gospel brings. Convinced sinners will rejoice to hear of a Saviour, and therefore we should *"preach to them Jesus,"* and make *"manifest the savour of the knowledge of him, & whom to know is life eternal."* This will lead us to consider the dignity of his person as the *Son of God*, and those several offices which he sustains, as the prophet, the priest, and the king of his church. Here we shall have occasion to treat of his mysterious incarnation, his holy life, his divine doctrine, his wonderful miracles, his painful and accursed death, his resurrection and ascension into heaven, his exaltation to the right-hand of God, and his glorious appearance to the universal judgment. These arguments should be frequently and largely insisted upon, because they are the distinguishing articles of the Christian revelation, and if they are not of high importance, that revelation was given us in vain.

^a Mat. ix. 12, 13.

^d Luke ii. 10.

^e John xvii. 3.

^a iii. 7.

^b Rom. iii. 19.

^c Acts xvii. 18.

^e Acts xvi. 30.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 14.

Having proposed to lost sinners that ¹ *redemption which the blessed Jesus hath obtained*, we should then acquaint them with the method in which it is applied by the Holy Ghost. This will bring us to open the nature of faith, repentance, and effectual calling, and to shew in what manner they are wrought. An account of these may be useful to all sorts of hearers, the unregenerate sinner may thereby be convinced that he is destitute of them, and this may put him upon fervent prayer, and constant endeavours after an acquaintance with them: And sincere Christians will be wonderfully confirmed and comforted, by discourses on these mysteries of the ¹ *kingdom of God within us*, because they will be only a transcript of that original draught of them, which is more fairly inscribed upon their hearts, by the sacred Spirit himself. It is an excellent attainment in a minister, to be able to handle these subjects clearly and distinctly; and nothing will conduce more to this, than a strict observation of the various turns and movements of the soul, and an experience of them in ourselves; for as ² *in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man*.

The privileges of true believers do likewise deserve our very attentive regards. These are many and valuable too; they are ¹ *blest with all spiritual blessings in Christ*, and it is fit they should know what they are, that they may rejoice in them. The apostle Paul hath left us several excellent discourses on these heads, which should greatly recommend them to all Christian ministers, who desire to form themselves on so compleat a model.

Neither should we neglect the various exercises and trials, which the servants of God are exposed to in this life. These proceed from different causes, and will require a distinct and particular consideration, if

² Heb. ix. 12.

¹ Eph. i. 3.

¹ Luke xvii. 21.

² Prov. xxvii. 19.

we would assist them in their way to heaven. It is a necessary and useful part of our work, ^a to comfort them who are in trouble, and to say ^b unto them who are of a fearful heart, be strong. We should always be ready, ^c to speak a word in season to him that is weary; these stand in peculiar need of our assistance, and we shall be very defective in our duty, if we do not give it them, in the most kind and tender manner.

I add, that we must constantly and earnestly ^d affirm, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. The great duties of the Christian life must be particularly drawn out, and press'd, that ^e the doctrine of God our Saviour may in all things be adorned, by a becoming conversation. And if we would acquit ourselves as ^f ministers of the New Testament, and manage our practical discourses in a way suitable to the Gospel dispensation, we must direct men to those assistances which are promised, and to those animating motives which are proposed there, to enable and incline them, to purify themselves from the pollutions ^g of the flesh and of the spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. Nothing will be done without divine influences, and there are no arguments so forcible as those which are taken from evangelical considerations; and if these are omitted, we shall treat on moral subjects with less propriety and spirit, than many heathens have done.

These are some of those weighty subjects, which we should handle at large in the course of our preaching. And in the management of them, we ought always in the first place to consult ^h the oracles of God. There is an admirable fulness and sufficiency in the Holy Scriptures, ⁱ for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; they will

^a 2 Cor. i. 4.

^b Is. xxxv. 4.

^c 1. 4.

^d Tit. iii. 8.

^e ii. 10.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 6.

^g vii. 1.

^h Rom. iii. 2.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

furnish us with the most solid and popular thoughts, to illustrate, confirm, and enforce the arguments we are upon. If we will be at the pains to collect out of the inspired Volume, the hints which are given on any topic, we shall be surprised to find, how well they are adapted, to render the ^a *man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*. In the forming of our discourses, we should attend more to ^b *that which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual*, and then our sermons would be more compleat, and much more edifying than they generally are.

It is certainly of great importance, that we should be well acquainted with the contents, and with the sense of the sacred writings. We should frequently read them, diligently study them, and as we have opportunity, we should expound them in our families, and in our congregations: If this be our constant practice, we may then hope, that we shall be ^c *as scribes instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, bringing forth out of our treasures things new and old*.

Nor would I have the writings of other wise and good men entirely laid aside; I could rather wish, that the use of some of them, which are much neglected, might be revived. I particularly refer to the works of some of the *old Puritans*, and of the *Divines* of the last age. I own myself an admirer of them, and have often thought it a great mercy, that there are so many of them in the hands of the common people, to supply what is deficient in our more fashionable instructions. I allow that the style of those excellent men is sometimes heavy, their diction low, and their method not the most easy or just; but their thoughts are weighty, their matter substantial, and their discourses spiritual and affecting. I once asked a very *popular preacher*, (who filled a considerable post amongst us, with great reputation and usefulness)

^a 2 Tim. iii. 17.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 13.

^c Mat. xiii. 52.

how he attained to such an edifying way of preaching; and he answer'd me, that before he enter'd on the ministry, he spent one whole year in reading the *Bible* in a practical view, and in perusing the works of the *English Divines*; adding, that he believed few books of that sort had escaped him, which had been written since the *Reformation*. - I am afraid many who are undertaking the ministerial work, would reject such a proposal with vast contempt; yet I could heartily wish, that they who are designed for that sacred employment among *Protestant Dissenters*, would not altogether neglect this sort of preparation for it. Our experienced Christians would not then so frequently complain, that the preaching of our younger ministers, is no more to their edification and comfort.

I shall conclude this head with a few obvious remarks, concerning the form and manner of our sermons. And here I would recommend a distinct and clear method, a due mixture of argument and *pathos*, plain, easy and scriptural language, with a natural and lively delivery. If our discourses are confused, we shall but distract our hearers, and dry and abstract reasoning will be little regarded, because few can follow us thorough a long train of consequences: A flow of moving expressions, without solid thought and rational connexion, may fire the passions, and command the applauses of the weak, but will be tedious and despicable, to persons of a better judgment and deeper penetration, who desire to be ^a *fed with knowledge and understanding*. If our language be too lofty and sublime, we shall ^b *speak in an unknown tongue* to the greatest part of our assemblies; and all uncouth tones and gestures, will be shocking to those of a refined taste and polite education: But good sense and substantial divinity, cloathed with proper and familiar language, and delivered with unaffected

^a Jer. iii. 15.

^b 1 Cor. xiv. 19.

vivacity and seriousness, tends to make an agreeable and useful preacher, and a judicious and improving auditory.

III. Public catechising of young persons is a proper method to revive and support the interests of religion.

There is a constant decrease of our congregations by death, and if there are none to fill up the places of those who are removed, such societies must quickly come to an end. Great care should therefore be taken of the rising age, that when *a we sleep with our fathers, and are gathered to our people*, our children may appear as *b a seed to serve him, which may be accounted to the Lord for a generation*. And the best course we can take to form young persons for usefulness, will be to instil some good principles into them in their tender years. They are then capable of learning, and most disposed to submit themselves to our instructions; and if we are not wanting in our duty to them, we may hope, that their minds will early be furnished with such a stock of divine knowledge, as will preserve them from loose and extravagant notions, and lay a happy foundation for their being serviceable in the church of God.

I have often observed a visible difference between those who have been *c brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, and those who are *d called by the grace of God*, out of irreligious families. The latter have sometimes proved very zealous and affectionate Christians, but they have generally been unstable and unsettled, liable to be *e carried about with every wind of doctrine*, while the former have been more established, both in principle and practice.

Besides, catechising of children will be a means to fit us for preaching to our people. 'Tis exceeding

^a Gen. xxv. 8.

^b Ps. xxii. 30.

^c Eph. vi. 4.

^d Gal. i. 15.

^e Eph. iv. 14.

difficult to speak with any tolerable degree of propriety and exactness, and yet with such a plainness and simplicity, as shall be accommodated to the capacities of the lowest of our hearers. If we study this as much as we possibly can, and strive to address ourselves to them, in all the condescending forms of easy and familiar language, we shall scarcely be able to carry them with us, from the beginning to the end of a discourse. But pulpit conversation with young persons would wonderfully assist us in this very important article.

And as it would teach us how to speak, so it will enable them to hear with greater advantage. We often complain that we do little good by our ministry, and the just occasion of these complaints is but too evident. The ignorance of our hearers is a great hindrance to their improvement. They are such utter strangers to the affairs of religion, that they apprehend but little of them, when they are proposed to them. But this would be in a great measure prevented by an early instruction; that would enlighten their minds, and inform their judgments, and fit them for a more profitable attendance on sermons.

I may add, that the management of this work will lead us to consider the whole compass of christian-duty. There are many things which we cannot so easily come at in the ordinary course of our preaching. If we chuse a text, on purpose to enforce a duty, or reprove a sin, in which some of our people are particularly and evidently concerned, those who are most criminal will be ready to interpret it, as a personal reflection, and a public affront; and thus the end of our exhortations and admonitions will not only be lost, but we shall inflame their passions, instead of reforming their conduct. But when we meet with offenders in our known paths, in the stated course of our catechetical lectures, we may rebuke them with that severity, which our office, and their

crimes do require, without exposing ourselves to their resentments.

Neither can I omit to observe, that there are many in all our assemblies, whose age and circumstances prevent their submitting to this way of instruction, who yet stand in great need of it. They are *children in understanding*, though advanced in years; and if this work be wisely managed, it may be servicable to them; it may give them the information which they want, without the shame of confessing their ignorance. Upon this account we should take those opportunities for it, when the auditory is largest, that all may reap the benefit of it.

I know but of one objection of any moment, which can be made against this practice. It may perhaps be urged, that catechisms are human composures, and generally formed upon a particular scheme of religion; and consequently by putting them so early into the hands of young persons, we may prepossess them in favour of a set of notions and phrases; and these prejudices of education taking deep root in their mind, may produce in them a bigotted attachment to that system.

To this I answer, that there is nothing, however excellent and useful, but may be perverted to bad purposes. Eating and drinking are absolutely necessary to the preservation of our lives, and yet they are frequently abused by intemperance and excess: But would it not be absurd for any to move, that to prevent this, they might be entirely laid aside. The application is obvious; and I persuade myself it will be found a very possible thing, so to order the business of catechising youth, as that it shall be free from the inconveniencies which have been objected.

The shorter catechism of the *Assembly of Divines* is generally taught in our churches. The doctrines of

redemption and grace are there proposed, as they appear'd to that *venerable body*, to be deliver'd in the scriptures, and as they had been generally received by our first reformers. If any should attempt to draw conclusions from them, prejudicial to the interests of practical godliness, they are abundantly prevented, by the particular account that is given, of the duty which God requireth of man. The principles laid down by the judicious authors of that *system*, are sufficiently secured from such dangerous inferences, by their admirable comment upon the ten commandments, and by their insisting on faith, repentance, and the use of all outward means appointed by God, as necessary to salvation. I have given a public testimony of my regard to that valuable *compendium* of christianity, and yet I would by no means oblige others to declare their assent to every thing contained in it. Our *brethren* who scruple the baptizing of infants, may make a good use of the other parts of it; and so may they, who are not satisfied with some other particulars which are asserted there. Or if they apprehend, that the catechism itself is rather a *meat for strong men, than milk for babes*, and is not so well adapted to the capacities of children, and the circumstances of those they are to instruct, they may go directly to the scriptures, and from thence draw out the great principles of our holy religion. It is one happy consequence of our being deliver'd from the restraints of a *national establishment*, that we are not confined to a prescribed form of words in our administrations; and if we will not allow each other the liberty in catechising, which we take in the other parts of our work, we are too narrow and too severe in our sentiments. Impositions are seldom very agreeable, and they can never appear in a more ungraceful view, than when attempted by those who have long complained of

* Heb. v. 13, 14.

them,

them, and who are destitute of all authority to support them.

And I further advise, that whatever catechism we use, we should insist chiefly upon the general principles of christianity, and explain the catechism by the scriptures, and not the scriptures by the catechism; and that we should frequently inculcate it upon our catechumens, that there is a great difference between the regards which we owe to the inspired writings, and those which are due to the composures of fallible men. Public catechising carried on in these catholic methods, will conduce to the support of the declining interests of religion, and should not be neglected. If any of us have not allowed it a share in our public labours, we ought immediately to set about it, and where it hath been discontinued, it should be revived. And I would press this with earnestness, because I have found the advantage of it, by the experience of more than twenty years.

IV. We should frequently visit our people, and manage our visits in such a manner, as will most effectually promote their spiritual improvement.

By personal conference, we shall have opportunity of informing ourselves particularly in the circumstances of their case, and shall know how to address our discourse to them, in the manner most immediately adapted, to their genius and their temper, their exercises and their temptations. Besides, on such occasions our counsel may be more direct, and our reproofs more determinate; we have then an opportunity of saying, *thou art the man*^a. Whereas in our addresses to a multitude, people are prone to apply to others, what was designed for themselves, whereby our intentions are frequently defeated. On both these accounts, more good may

^a 2 Sam. xii. 7.

be done to the person we are speaking to, by one hour's free conversation, than by many sermons.

But if we desire to attain these valuable ends, we must conduct ourselves in a manner becoming our character. I fear there is a foundation for many uneasy reflections on this head, and that the hours we spend in visiting our people, must be often placed to the account of our lost time. It is well if we do not sometimes fall into those strains of conversation which we should always discourage, and turn them out of the way of duty, instead of leading of them in it. And where there is a greater care to *keep our tongue from evil, and our lips from speaking guile*^a, though the discourse be not criminal, it is, perhaps, empty and unprofitable. A gay turn and a diverting story, are oftentimes the most innocent, and the most important parts of it. Not that I would be so severe, as to censure every thing that hath the air of cheerfulness, even in a minister. A sedentary life, or a thoughtful, or perhaps a melancholy temper, may render such relaxations not only pardonable, but necessary. But surely a man in the sacred office should rise higher, and aim at something more noble and substantial in his visits, than to raise a laugh and divert the company; ^b *they should talk of God's righteousness all the day long, and make known the glorious majesty of his kingdom*^c, that they might be *examples to the believers in word*^d, and in the gravity of their conversation.

Some ministers have a very happy talent, of connecting serious and useful reflections with the subject of discourse, be it what it will. They know how to give it a surprising but natural turn, and can introduce something which shall be entertaining and instructing, without the least appearance of indecency and affectation. ^e The company they keep are often

^a Ps. xxxiv. 13.

^d 1 Tim. iv. 13.

^b Ps. lxxi. 24.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 16.

^c Ps. cxlv. 12.

caught with guile, and contrary to their intentions, are insensibly led to that which is profitable and edifying. This is an art which we should study and cultivate, that we might not only *teach our people publickly, but from house to house*^a, by the prudent management of our ministerial visits. And indeed this is necessary as well as expedient; for if we never mention religion but in public, and take no notice of it but on the Lord's-day, the life of it will not be long preserved, and many will suspect, that we are not heartily engaged in the support of it.

And our visits ought to be seasonable as well as useful. Times of affliction will require a constant attendance; but when it is otherwise, we should *withdraw our foot from our neighbour's house, lest he be weary of us and hate us*^b. If we intrude ourselves upon our people when they are engaged in business, we shall either make them uneasy, or lead them into a neglect of it; and we shall do them a greater injury, if by our late hours, we interrupt the religious exercises of their families.

I will only add, that we ought to have a great regard to children and young persons, and endeavour to manage our visits so as to preserve an interest in their esteem and affection. It is very unhappy, when our company is burdensome and uneasy to them, and they cannot see us enter the houses of their parents, without disgust and resentment. In some *sons of Belial*^c, and children of the wicked one, this may arise from a fixed and settled enmity against godliness. But it is not always so. The negligent, and perhaps forbidding airs which some put on, have made them indifferent to persons of our profession, or even incens'd them against us. I hope many are not criminal in this respect, but those whose natural temper inclines them to distance and

^a Acts xx. 20.^b Prov. xxv. 17.^c 1 Sam. ii. 12.

severity should particularly dwell upon the reflection. And we should all be on our guard against every thing of this nature, lest we put ourselves out of a capacity of doing good, where we might otherwise most reasonably hope it. This will certainly be much to the detriment of religion in the general, and a peculiar grief to pious parents.

V. I further propose, that we take a particular notice of those who are under religious impressions.

They have the greatest need of our assistance, and generally speaking are very desirous of it; but an excess of modesty often hinders them from making their application to us, and giving vent to the fulness of their hearts. And the enemy of souls lays obstructions in their way, lest we should animate them in their attempts of throwing off his yoke. We should not therefore stay 'till they come to us, but should inquire after them, and find them out, and talk freely with them about those great concerns which lie upon their minds. These are the *lambs* which our Saviour hath commanded us to ^a feed; yea we should ^b lay them in our bosom, and in the most gentle and tender manner, lead them on in the ways of holiness and comfort. We should cherish these little ones, ^c even as a nurse cherisheth her children, ^d taking them by the hand, and teaching them to go, until increase of strength and greater maturity enable them to walk without so much of our assistance.

This may be useful to us in our public work. By conversing with awakened consciences, we shall be acquainted with the methods which the Holy Spirit takes, in the conversion of sinners unto God. We shall see a beautiful and entertaining variety in them, according to the different tempers and circumstances of those, on whose hearts he is moving. Upon these we are to make our strictest observations, as the wise

^a John xxi. 15.

^b Is. xl. 11.

^c 1 Th. ii. 7.

^d Hos. xi. 3.

heiner physician does on the symptoms which appear in his patients, that he may know how to administer proper ~~remedies~~ to them, and to others in the like case. A good collection of such remarks, with the assistance of our Bibles, will teach us how to preach, much better than the methods which are frequently taken for that purpose.

And really we cannot with any reason expect, that religion should flourish, while this duty is neglected. The persons whose case I have now been describing, must fill up our breaches ; but if we neglect them, they will either be dishearten'd and discouraged, or grow remiss and indifferent. 'Tis possible as to many of them, the impressions may entirely wear off, and their ^a *goodness become like the morning cloud and early dew, that soon goeth away.* Or if their hearts be touched with God's special grace, much of their improvement and comfort may be lost, and they may perhaps content themselves with continuing in the number of our hearers, without joining in communion with our churches. I am fully persuaded the interests of religion have suffered very much by our neglect in this particular, and I heartily wish I was the only person who had reason to lament these kind of omissions. May we reflect upon them with a severity bearing some proportion to the guilt, and may this produce such an holy ^b *zeal and carefulness,* that in our future conduct we might *in all things approve ourselves to be clear in this matter.*

VI. Admonition and reproof must not be neglected, if we desire religion should flourish under our care.

I confess, this is a difficult work, considering our own circumstances, and the humour of the age in which we live. Reproof is seldom well received, and is sometimes peculiarly displeasing, when it comes

^a Hof. vi. 4.

^b 2 Cor. vii. 11.

from the mouth of a minister. Of those to whom we shall have occasion to address it, some perhaps will treat us with tolerable decency and good manners, and yet secretly charge us as very impertinent, for pretending to meddle with their conduct; at best they will pity our weakness, in imagining that we have any authority over them. They value themselves so much on their liberty, that they think a visible neglect of every thing we say, to be a necessary defence of it. But others of a more rough and boisterous disposition *a will turn again and rent us.* Their resentments will express themselves in severer ways, which may be felt by ourselves and families, and it is possible they may fancy they are acting an heroic part, without considering *b that he who hateth reproof is brutish.*

But we must perform our duty, whatever the consequences may be. That hardness of heart which generally prevailed amongst the *Jews*, might make this work peculiarly difficult and hazardous, and yet God expressly enjoins it, not only on the priests, but on every *Israelite*, and declares that the neglect of it was rather cruelty than friendship. *c Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.* And Christians should admonish *d and exhort one another daily, lest any of them be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* And if this be the duty of those in a more private capacity, a minister by virtue of his public character, must be under stronger obligations to it, and ought to *e reprove and rebuke with all authority.*

The difficulties which do attend it, ought not to deter us from it; they may indeed convince us, that we want wisdom to manage it aright, and should engage us *f to ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not;* and they should also lead us to

a Mat. vii. 6.*b* Prov. xii. 1.*c* Levit. xix. 17.*d* Heb. iii. 13.*e* Tit. ii. 15.*f* Jam. i. 5.

use all necessary precautions, with regard to the time, and the manner of giving the reproof, but not discourage us from attempting of it.

There are few tempers so rugged and untractable, but they have their softer and milder intervals, in which we may have access to them. These should be attended to and embraced, as the happiest opportunities of doing them good. ^a *A word spoken in due season, how good is it?* It must likewise be our care to deliver the admonition in ^b *the spirit of meekness*; in the gentlest language, and most obliging manner. This will make it evidently appear, that we are not venting our spleen, but act on the principles of conscience and friendship, and that while we see and blame something amiss, we have not forgotten what is agreeable and praise-worthy. ^c *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* When we mix anger and bitterness with our reproofs, they look like the malicious attacks of an enemy, and not the kind advices of a friend, and may engage a man's reputation in the defence of his faults; ^d *whereas a soft tongue breaketh the bone*, and often overcomes the morose and obstinate.

And if such measures be taken, we shall prevent many of those troublesome consequences, which we may be ready to apprehend from the discharge of this duty. ^e *We shall commend ourselves to the consciences of men*; and though a few incorrigible and worthless creatures, may for the present ^f *trample under their feet* our wholesome counsel, yet ^g *we shall have delight*, and a good blessing will be upon us, and afterwards ^h *we may find more favour even with them, than he that flattereth with the tongue.* And the more candid part of mankind, in whom there is a principle of true piety, will esteem such admonitions as

^a Prov. xv. 23.

^b Gal. vi. 1.

^c James i. 20.

^d Prov. xxv. 15.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 2.

^f Mat. vii. 6.

^g Prov. xxiv. 25.

^h xxviii. 23.

instances of uncommon fidelity and affection. They will value us more than they would have done, had these good offices been neglected, and will say with *David*, *let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head*^a, but will engage me to pray for them in their calamities. Thus a wise reprover upon an obedient ear, will be as an ear-ring of gold, and as an ornament of fine gold^b. A happy conjunction of these, will add beauty and glory to both of them. He who gave the reproof will rejoice in the success, and recommend himself by his prudence and faithfulness: He that received it, will be thankful for the benefit, and appear amiable, as being^c *cloathed with humility and patience*; their regards to each other will increase, and their hearts will be united by the bonds of an inviolable affection.

VII. If we desire the revival of religion, we should be much in prayer for the blessing of God upon our endeavours.

Without this all our attempts will be ineffectual. *Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom we have believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*^d *Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.* So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase. The zeal, the skill, and the fidelity of an inspired apostle, were insufficient for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the church of God; and what can we do with our meaner furniture, *if the hand of the Lord is not with us?*

Surely experience must have taught many of us, that the most convincing arguments, and the most pathetic addresses, are lost upon our people, 'till

^a Ps. cxli. 5.

^b Prov. xxv. 12.

^c 1 Pet. v. 5.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 5.

^e vi. 7.

^f Acts xi. 21.

God come in to add efficacy to them. And if we will not learn this important lesson, or will not regard it, but still indulge a dependance upon ourselves, we justly provoke him, to exercise us with repeated disappointments. To prevent this, let us fly to the *throne of grace*, and earnestly plead for those divine influences, which are absolutely necessary for our succeeding, in the work in which we are employed. Let us say, *Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and behold and visit this vine, and the vineyard which thy right-hand hath planted: Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands, that we might see of the travel of our soul, and be satisfied: Open the hearts of our bearers, that they may attend to the things which are spoken by us, that the arm of the Lord being with us, great numbers may believe, and turn to the Lord.*

We should allow these petitions a share in the stated devotions of the closet, the family, and *the House of God*. And I cannot but think it highly convenient, that at proper periods, both in private and public, we set apart time, for extraordinary addresses to the *throne of grace*, on this momentous occasion. And if we revived that laudable but much neglected practice of fasting, and joined it with prayer, it might render the sacred exercise more lively and spiritual, and would manifest a deep concern for the divine regards. And it will conduce much to the preparing of us for this solemn work, if before we engage in it, a strict account were taken of our own temper and conduct, of the state of religion in our respective congregations, and of the success of our ministry among our people: This would *teach us to order our speech before God*, in the most proper manner.

^a Heb. iv. 16.

^b Psalm lxxx. 14, 15.

^c Ibid. xc. 17.

^d Is. liii. 1.

^e Acts xvi. 14.

^f Ibid. xi. 21.

^g 1 Tim. iii. 15.

^h Job xxxvii. 19.

The careful observation of such pious solemnities, as I have now been recommending, might be attended with many happy consequences. When they pass in secret, they may awaken our souls out of that spiritual lethargy, into which we are too apt to relapse, and when we join with others in them, serious impressions might be communicated to each other, and to our people. But it is above all things to be consider'd, that by these applications we might humbly hope, to engage much of the presence of GOD with us, ^a *to revive his work in the midst of the years.* ^b *The residue of the spirit is with him, which he will* ^c *give to them that ask him.* And this Holy Spirit is all we need, to recover the languishing interests of religion, and diffuse beauty and vigour through our churches. ^d *If God pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground: If he pour his spirit on our seed, and his blessing on our offspring; they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say I am the Lord's; another shall call himself by the name of Jacob, and another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

VIII. We must take the greatest care to support these attempts, by a regular and exemplary behaviour.

The eyes of many are upon us, ^e *for we are as a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid.* Notice will be taken of what we do, as well as of what we say; and if we say and do not ^f, neglecting to teach ourselves, while we teach others, but dishonour God through breaking the law, and yet make our boast of the law ^g, we shall do great disservice to the interests of religion, and infinite mischief to the souls of men. Our acti-

^a Hab. iii. 2.

^b Mal. ii. 15.

^c Luke xi. 13.

^d Is. xlv. 4, 5, 6.

^e Mat. v. 14.

^f xxiii. 3.

^g Rom. ii. 21, 23.

ons will be accounted the true interpreters of the inward sentiments of our minds; and if we discover a practical indifference towards the duties which we recommend to others, many will conclude, that we ourselves are not convinced of the importance of them; and from thence will very briskly, though very weakly infer, that there is nothing real in the whole affair. *Thus we build again the things we would destroy*^a, and abundantly confirm sinners in their infidelity and wickedness, while we attempt to turn them from *the errors of their ways*^b.

On these accounts we should *be harmless as doves* and most solicitously avoid every thing that is apparently evil. And it is necessary *that we be wise as serpents*^c, and constantly guard against indiscretions of behaviour. They sink our reputation, and must proportionably impair our usefulness. Prudence is an excellent qualification in a minister; the want of it will cloud the brightest talents, and eclipse the greatest abilities. It is a most unhappy circumstance, when people are to hear those on the Lord's-day, who have all the week been exposing themselves by their follies. If their performances are extraordinary, *they are but as a fair woman without discretion*^d: their beautiful composures may please a younger audience, and procure them a multitude of unexperienced admirers, but the men of good conduct will always be prefer'd by the most valuable part of mankind. *The Lord will make the wise servant ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season*^e.

Our treatment of each other ought to be generous and kind, sincere and friendly, remembering that we are engaged in a cause, which will require the strictest union to support it. If we are divided among our selves, and make it our business by little stories to lessen one another in the eyes of the people, the

^a Gal. ii. 18.^b Jam. v. 20.^c Mat. x. 16.^d Prov. xi. 22.^e Mat. xxiv. 45.

common interests of serious piety will suffer very much by it. Are our hearers such strangers to the arts of backbiting and defamation, that they need to be taught them by our example? Or is it a thing so reputable, that we should desire it may appear to be a part of our character? Are we secure that after all, the reproach will not turn upon ourselves, or that the very persons we are speaking to will not despise us, as acted by principles of envy and ill-nature? Or if we were sure the reflection would fix where we intended it, is the usefulness of ministers so great, that we should desire to hinder it? Is an attachment to one minister to the neglect of all others, so amiable a temper, that we should attempt to infuse it into those committed to our care? Shall we endeavour to revive that carnality, which the Apostle condemns in the *Corinthians*, * *while one said I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos*? Should we not rather make the most vigorous efforts to suppress every thing of this sort, as that which will always be prejudicial to Christianity? It affords me a peculiar satisfaction, that the ministers in these parts have been happily preserved from these vile and dishonourable practices: But the prevalency of them elsewhere, hath led me to mention them with a warmth and severity, which the malignant nature of them does require; since I never yet saw religion flourish, where there was not harmony and friendship among the ministers of the Gospel.

Our carriage toward our people ought to be tender and affectionate, full of all beneficence and kindness. We should speak courteously to them, and always act the part of sincere and active friends, both towards them and their families. We should frequently visit them in their sickness, condole with them in their sorrows, and at all times compassionately bear them upon our hearts. We should carry about with us a pa-

ternal affection for them, and look upon ourselves obliged to assist them in all the exigences of life.

Such a behaviour as this will give us a share in their esteem, and put us into a capacity of being useful to them in their spiritual concerns, far beyond what the most eminent ministerial gifts can secure without it. This will make our public labours edifying, our private conversation desirable, and will procure a favourable reception for our reproofs. If they respect and love us, every thing will be viewed in the best light, and all proper allowances made for human frailties; whereas, if the contrary temper prevails in them, nothing that we can say or do will be acceptable. Prejudice will find something to blame, or to despise in our best actions; and if there be any thing doubtful in our conduct, the worst turn will be given to it. Our faults will be represented in the most invidious colours, and our infirmities will be blacken'd into the most enormous crimes: and when this comes to be the unhappy case between a minister and his people, what can be expected, but the ruin of religion in that society?

These are the methods which I would propose to the ministers of the Gospel, for *the strengthening the things which remain, that are ready to die*. I hope that you, my *reverend brethren*, to whom I now speak, will pardon the freedom with which I have laid them before you. I would speak to myself in the first place; and as we are apt to judge of others by ourselves, so perhaps a deep sense of my own defects may have carried me further into these particulars, than I should otherwise have presumed to have gone. If I have exceeded my bounds, an honest intention, and a tender concern for the dying interests of Christianity, must be some apology for me. I doubt not, but your own thoughts will suggest to you things of greater importance, than some of those I have mentioned; others are apparently of greatest moment, and I hope, none of them are entirely foreign to the subject,

subject, or the occasion of our meeting together this day. May what has now been offered, and every thing else which our consciences shall charge on us, as necessary to the revival of religion, be most carefully attended to by us.

And that it might be so, I shall propose the following considerations.

1. Consider what it is that is dying; it is vital and practical religion, the glory of our churches.

The christian church is very glorious. The glory of it is infinitely superior to that of the *Jewish*. There was something very amiable and beautiful in the ordinances of the tabernacle, and much more of the temple; but they had *no glory in respect* of the evangelical dispensation. ** For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth.*

And wherein does the glory of the gospel church consist? Some place it in stately buildings, in curious paintings, in embroider'd vestments, in the finest music, and in other things which regale the senses, and amuse the imagination. But alas, external delicacy and pomp, are only a mean and contemptible image of it. Practical godliness, the life of God in the souls of men producing *b the fruits of righteousness*, is the ornament of the church, since Christ hath appeared under the character of its head.

The prophet *Isaiab* had a much better notion of the glory of the christian church, than many who live in the gospel age, and should be supposed by their office best to understand it. According to him, ** when Jerusalem is become the holy city, and the uncircumcised and unclean are not to be found in it, then Zion puts on her beautiful garments.* When the disciples of Jesus are *d all glorious within*, by being made *e partakers of the divine nature*, and shall be so eminent for piety and virtue, *f that men shall call them the holy peo-*

a 2 Cor. iii. 10, 11.

b Phil. i. 11.

c II. iii. 1.

d Ps. xlv. 13.

e 2 Pet. i. 4.

f II. lxii. 12.

ple, ^a then the glory of the Lord is seen upon them. But if godliness declines, and the spirit of grace withdraws, the new testament *Shechinah* is gone, and ^b the glory is departed from us.

Our fathers in the ministry made a noble stand, in defence of pure and primitive Christianity, when they formed separate societies for the worship of God. Many excellent Christians countenanced the design, and committed themselves to the care of those ^c *pastors* after God's own heart, for their spiritual improvement. ^d How amiable were the tabernacles of the Lord of hosts in those happy days, when they who resorted to them were ^e *holiness to the Lord*, and our churches were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied! these faithful ^f *servants of Jesus Christ*, after they had honourably served their own generation by the will of God fell on sleep, and we ^h are enter'd into their labours; and if ⁱ *pure religion and undefiled* should die with them, all beauty will be departed from the daughter of Zion, and we shall lose the ornament and glory of our assemblies. We may boast of our liberty in calling *no man father upon the earth*, and value ourselves upon an attachment to that supremacy which is vested in our Saviour, in the sacred concerns of his kingdom, but if we are ^l *the servants of corruption*, we only ^m *speaking great swelling words of vanity*, and our glorying is not good. We reject the Redeemer's authority in some of its most important branches, are inconsistent with ourselves, and disgrace the cause in which we are engaged, if we do not ⁿ *depart from all iniquity*, and are not a ^o *peculiar people, zealous of good works*.

^a *Isa. lx. 1.* ^b *1 Sam. iv. 24.* ^c *Jer. iii. 15.* ^d *Ps. lxxiv. 1.*
^e *Jer. ii. 3.* ^f *Rom. i. 1.* ^g *Acts xiii. 36.* ^h *John iv. 38.*
ⁱ *James i. 27.* ^j *Mat. xxiii. 8.* ^k *2 Pet. ii. 18, 19.*
^l *1 Cor. v. 6.* ^m *2 Tim. ii. 19.* ⁿ *Tit. ii. 14.*

2. The revival of religion among us may prevent the growth of infidelity, and bigotry.

In our degenerate age, there are many *a making to themselves a captain and returning into Egypt*. They reject the gospel revelation, and adhere to the light of nature, as sufficient to conduct them to happiness. And the importunate applications which have frequently been made to the rulers of this world, to employ their power in suppressing unbelievers, have greatly increased their prejudices against Christianity. This hath led them to conclude, that it is only an artful scheme, contrived by subtle and designing men, and supported for the purposes of this present life, which would soon fall to the ground, if the civil magistrate should withdraw his assistance from it.

Through the favour of wise and moderate governors, we are protected in our christian profession; and this, perhaps, is all the service they can do us, so far as our religious interests are concerned. Our Saviour's *kingdom is not of this world*; it appeared in its brightest glory, *when the kings of the earth took counsel together to destroy it*, but hath visibly declined, ever since its sacred affairs have been managed by them. The annexing large revenues to the observance of external forms may establish the use of them, and length of time may produce a bigotted attachment to them, but real godliness is infinitely beyond the reach of all human authority.

This should inspire us with the warmest zeal for the revival of Christianity, in a way agreeable to its nature, that it may flourish in all our assemblies. The enemies of it will then see, that it may be supported, without the fences of penal laws, and the props and buttresses of a legal establishment. The intrinsic excellency and goodness of the christian institution will then appear in the strongest light, and we shall stand

^a Numb. xiv. 4.

^b John xviii. 36.

^c Psal. ii. 2.

as an invincible barrier, to stop the mighty progress of infidelity. We shall then ^a *take away the reproach from Israel*, and convince men, that the regards due to *Jesus* may be secured by more mild and gentle methods, than those which have been taken by the votaries of *Mahomet*, to defend the honour of their pretended prophet.

As to bigotry, it hath a very unhappy influence upon those who are under the power of it. Such are often forming good designs, and pursuing of them with uncommon vigour; but every thing must be carried on in their own way, or else they have no opinion of it. Their principles are always orthodox, and those who differ from them are fallen into great and dangerous errors. Their church is the purest, if not the only one in the world, and their forms of worship are, all of them, apostolical and divine. In the Redeemer's catholic religion, ^b *there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, c but Christ is all in all, and we are all in him*; and yet they confine it to their own narrow inclosures, and can see no beauty even in Christianity itself, unless it be cloathed with their singularities, and does appear in their distinguishing dress.

It will be to very little purpose to enter into any debates with them. That turn of mind which disposeth them to this way of thinking, will render the strongest arguments ineffectual. It is but seldom that they see, or will attend to the force of them; and if at any time they are pressed with them, instead of returning a solid answer, or submitting to conviction, their passions rise, and the dispute generally ends ^d *in wrath, clamour, and evil-speaking*. There is another method by which we are much more likely to do them good, and that is, ^e *to be fervent in spirit, serv-*

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 26.

^b Col. iii. 11.

^c Gal. iii. 28.

^d Eph. iv. 31.

^e Rom. xii. 11.

ing the Lord, that when those of a denomination different from us, observe in us the substantial parts of the christian life, they may be brought to acknowledge, that ^a *as they are Christ's, even so we are Christ's.* ^b *If we are passed from death to life, we shall love the brethren.* Real godliness will powerfully attract the affections of all its hearty friends, and a pious mind will always feel the force of a bright example. Thus our attempts to revive religion, may be a means to diffuse a noble and excellent *spirit of love* among all the disciples of Jesus, and to enlarge their hearts, which are often too much contracted by a bigotted fondness for their own schemes. This is of much greater importance than the most exact uniformity, either in articles of faith, or in modes of worship, and will prevent those mischievous consequences, which have proceeded from different apprehensions about them.

3. A regard to our reputation should engage us to attempt the revival of religion.

God and man have peculiarly referr'd it to our care. The ^d *Holy Ghost* hath made us overseers of the flock, and the societies we minister to, have made choice of us to attend their spiritual affairs. We have been solemnly set apart to this service, and have voluntarily devoted ourselves to it. ^e *The vows of God are upon us*, and if we corrupt the covenant of Levi, and betray this important trust, ^f *we shall become contemptible before all the people*, and be the most guilty and despicable wretches upon earth. Treachery is deservedly infamous; and can there be a fouler instance of it than this! That a man who calls himself a minister of the gospel, and hath enter'd upon that work with the most awful solemnities, and sacred engagements to the Redeemer and his church, should after all entirely

^a 2 Cor. x. 7.

^d Acts xx. 23.

^b 1 John iii. 14.

^e Psal. lvi. 12.

^c 2 Tim. i. 7.

^f Mal. ii. 7, 8.

neglect it, and go over to the *tents of wickedness* ! We shall scarcely meet with so detestable a character, among the dregs and refuse of the people. The perjur'd villain, whose crimes have brought him under the penalties of the law, and exposed him to public disgrace, is but a puny offender, if compar'd with these vile betrayers of their master's interest. Thinking men are now sufficiently aware of the hypocrisy of such a conduct, and will no longer be amused with fine discourses, on the honours due to those invested with the sacred function, while they indulge themselves in the blackest crimes. If they are *become vile*, and *make men abhor the offerings of the Lord*, their distinguishing profession will render their vices more odious, and will certainly draw on them, that neglect and contempt which they have so justly deserved. And if we share in the guilt, we must expect to take part in the disgrace,

On the contrary, if we faithfully discharge the duties of our office, we shall not only escape the shame and the reproach, but shall secure to ourselves honour both from God and man.

It is the declaration of that God whom we serve, *those that honour me, I will honour*. If like Zerubabel of old, we distinguish ourselves by our zeal for the house of the Lord, in an age of prevailing coldness and indifferency, like him we shall be *set as a signet*. And though our efforts are not so successful as we could wish for the gathering of Israel, we shall nevertheless *be glorious in the eyes of our God*, and be *to him a sweet savour of Christ, in them that perish*, as well as in those who are saved.

And with regard to men; sincere Christians will consider us as *the excellent of the earth*, *the salt and the light of it*, and will esteem us very highly in love

^a Psal. lxxiv. 10.

^d Hag. ii. 23.

^e Psal. xvi. 3.

^b 1 Sam. ii. 17.

^c Isa. xlix. 5.

^f Matth. v. 13, 14.

^g 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 15.

ⁱ 1 Thes. v. 13.

for our work sake. And the conduct I have been recommending, will procure us the regards of those who are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. If we renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, and do not walk in craftiness, nor handle the word of the Lord deceitfully^a, but labour to do our utmost, to promote and adorn religion, we shall irresistably command the approbation of the more degenerate part of mankind. Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and holy, though he himself was abandoned to luxury and injustice. That ^b messenger from the Lord was ^c a burning and shining light, zealous and active in the discharge of the duties of his office, and eminent in the strictness of his life: These added such a majesty and greatness to his behaviour, as gained the reverence of a wicked ruler. And if we act the same honourable part as that ^d prophet of the Highest, ^e iniquity shall stop its mouth, and the loose and profligate will applaud our characters, covet our friendship, and upon all occasions treat us with decency and respect.

4. Our support in life depends upon the regard which our people have to true religion.

The sacred office of the ministry, is often traduced as ^f a craft by which men get wealth, and an employment calculated for the purposes of this world. And it cannot be denied, but great occasion hath been given for these suspicions. But it is very ungenerous to cast such reflections upon those who give up the inviting prospects of a national constitution, and submit to the many disadvantages of an exclusion from it. This will incline the sober and candid part of mankind to conclude, that they are not entirely determined by secular views, in the choice of

^a 2 Cor. iv. 2. ^b Mat. xi. 10. ^c John iii. 35. ^d Luke i. 76.

^e Job v. 15. ^f Acts xix. 25.

their way. Surely it is some evidence of a disinterested zeal for religion, when they who are devoted to the care of it, are willing to refer the subsistence of themselves and families to the affection of their people? This was the primitive and apostolical way of maintaining the ministers of the gospel, and is admirably well adapted to that liberty, which is the peculiar glory of the christian dispensation.

The decays of real piety may sometimes render this method inconvenient. A growing indifference towards religion itself will dispose persons to treat ministers of all sorts with neglect. They will account them a useless, if not a mischievous set of men, that are only a dead weight upon the public, and will think it a very pardonable, and perhaps a very laudable piece of œconomy, to contract their exhibitions towards them, where the matter is left to their own choice. But when the hearts of our people are warmed with a lively sense of the excellency of godliness, *they will be rich in good works, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate.* They will then pay a chearful regard to those sacred injunctions, which ordain, that they *who wait at the altar, should be partakers with the altar, and they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel*^b. When they feel the powerful effects of our ministrations upon their souls, they will think it a small return for *spiritual things*, that they *who have sown them, should reap their carnal things*^c. And what they give upon these occasions, will be with a bountiful hand, and a friendly heart: And I may answer for it, that to a man of a truly generous temper, the most moderate allowance upon these honourable terms, will be far more agreeable, than the largest revenues, extorted by compulsion, and yielded with regret, and many loud complaints.

^a 1 Tim. iv. 18.^b 1 Cor. ix. 13, 14.^c ix. 11.

To all this I may add, that if we be faithful to God, and the souls of men, we may refer ourselves to the care of our great Master. When he sent forth his apostles to preach the gospel, he directed them to ^a *provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in their purses, for the workman was worthy of his meat.* They depended on providence for the supports of life, and yet ^b *they lacked nothing.* And if we are not too solicitously careful about these outward things, but trust in God, ^c *he will supply all our need, for the ^d earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.* We may readily conclude, that he who would not have ^e *the mouth of the ox muzzled, while he was treading out the corn,* to hinder his eating at his work, will certainly provide for his laborious servants. If we *plant and water the Lord's vineyard,* we shall *eat of the fruit thereof.* If we *feed the flock,* we shall *eat of the milk of the flock* ^f. And since no man goeth a warfare any time at his own charges, if we ^g *endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,* and ^h *play the men for our people, and the cities of our God,* ⁱ *the great captain of our salvation* will maintain us honourably in his service.

5. A consciousness of our having done our utmost for the revival of religion, will be a noble support in our dying moments.

In a little time the days of our ministration will be over, and we shall follow the multitude of our hearers, who are gone to the dark and silent grave. And the manner of our dying is of great importance both to ourselves and others. Our comfort, and their benefit, are evidently concerned in it. Surely, we must earnestly desire, that our

^a Mat. x. 9, 10.

^d Psalm xxiv. 1

^f 2 Sam. x. 12.

^b Luke xxii. 35.

^e 1 Cor. ix. 9.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 10.

^c Phil. iv. 19.

^h 1 Tim. v. 17.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 3.

end may be peace ^a, and it will be a pleasure, and a confirmation to those who have attended on our labours, to see ^b *an entrance ministred unto us abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* When they visit us in the concluding scene of life, and behold a smile in our countenances, flowing from the joy of our hearts, they will be established in the belief of the truth and excellency of that religion, which we have recommended to them.

And there is nothing which can lay a surer foundation, for a comfortable departure out of this world, than diligence and care to ^c *fulfil the ministry, which we have received in the Lord.* Such a fruitfulness in good works will be a happy evidence of the sincerity of our faith, and by consequence of our interest in the great Redeemer, whose Gospel we have preached. This was the consolation and rejoicing of the Apostle Paul, when he stood, as it were, between both worlds. ^d *He was ready to be offered up, and saw death making its approaches, in a form of violence and peculiar terror: ^e But none of these things moved him, ^f he had fought the good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith,* and this inspired him with that resolution and courage, which delivered him from the fears of ^g *what man could do unto him.* And if we can apply these characters to ourselves, we may expect tranquillity in our last moments. The pleasing views of that ^h *crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will give us,* as the reward of all our faithful services, will revive and comfort us, ⁱ *when walking through the valley of the shadow of death.*

This leads me to add,

^a Psalm xxxvii. 37.

^b 2 Pet. i. 11.

^c Col. iv. 17.

^d 2 Tim. iv. 6.

^e Acts xx. 24.

^f 2 Tim. iv. 7.

^g Psalm lvi. 11.

^h 2 Tim. iv. 8.

ⁱ Psalm xxiii. 4.

6. That our degree of glory in the future state, will be proportionable to our present zeal for the revival of religion.

The Redeemer hath furnished his ministers with different talents, and their advancement in the next world, will be according to their improvement of them. * *He who gained ten pounds, shall have authority over ten cities, and he that gained five pounds, shall be over five cities.* The Apostles, those ^b wise master builders, shall be prefer'd to the distinguishing honours ^c of sitting on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And other wisemen and teachers shall shine as the brightness of the firmament ^d; and the most eminent among them, ^e who have turned many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever, one star differing from another star in glory.

All the faithful servants of Jesus Christ, ^f who feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, shall stand with honour before the throne of the great Judge of the world. But those who are attended with the largest train of happy souls, shall appear with a peculiar glory. The sinners they have converted, and the saints they have edified, are now *their hope*, and will be *their joy and rejoicing*, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. Each of these shall be as a jewel, to adorn ^h the crown that fadeth not away, which the chief shepherd shall then place upon their heads.

To conclude, Let us make the most vigorous efforts for the revival of religion, that it may appear among us in its former glory. And I would

^a Luke xix. 17, 18.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 10.

^c Luke xxii. 30.

^d Dan. xii. 3.

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 41.

^f 1 Pet. v. 2.

^g 1 Th. ii. 19.

^h 1 Pet. v. 4.

further observe for our encouragement, that though religion be dying, yet it is not dead. Though it be a sinking cause, yet it is not a lost cause: There is still something remaining which may be strengthened. There were ^a a few names even in Sardis, which had not defiled their garments; and I am fully persuaded we are not ^b left alone, but there are many in our respective congregations, whose hearts are touched with a sense of our present decays, and are as much concerned about them as we ourselves. This ^c chosen generation are ready to set their hands to the work, and to join with us in all necessary endeavours to retrieve our religious interests, that a new face of things may appear in all our churches: And if the ^d glorious gospel of the blessed God does not depart from this nation, we may hope that we shall not ^e labour in vain. But if we should not succeed in these our pious attempts, yet ^f whereas it was in our heart to build the house of the Lord, we did well; and we may comfort ourselves with this, that the Redeemer's ^g kingdom shall not be destroyed, though the dissenting interest should be swallowed up in that degeneracy, which like a mighty flood is now breaking in upon us. ^h The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, and the christian church shall enlarge the place of its tent, and stretch forth the curtains of its habitation, and shall ⁱ break forth on the right-hand and on the left. ^k The man of sin, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, and sitteth in the temple of God, ^l the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming: And then the religion of Jesus shall appear again in its native purity, and

^a Rev. iii. 4. ^b Rom. xi. 3. ^c 1 Pet. ii. 9. ^d 1 Tim. i. 11.
^e Phil. ii. 16. ^f 2 Kings viii. 18. ^g Dan. vii. 14.
^h Is. xi. 9. ⁱ liv. 2, 3. ^j 2 Th. ii. 4. ^k Ibid. 8.

triumph over every thing which now obstructs the propagation of it. Thus *the Lord will comfort Zion, and make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert as the garden of the Lord, joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody*^a. In those happy times, Christianity shall have a powerful influence on its professors, righteousness and peace shall flourish among them, ^b *and Jerusalem shall be a praise in the earth*. Then ^c *the feeble shall be as David, and the house of David as the angel of the Lord*; all the differing characters of Christians shall be improved; ministers and people shall be a *crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their God*^d, adorning *the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*^e; and their honourable and useful lives shall conclude with an *entrance abundantly*^f into that blessed world of light, life and love, where religion shall shine in its brightest glory, without the least mixture of imperfection or decay. *Amen.*

^a If. li. 3.^b lxii. 7.^c Zech. xii. 8.^d If. lxii. 2.^e Tit. ii. 10.^f 2 Pet. i. 11.

F I N I S.

BOOKS *printed for* RICHARD HETT,
at the Bible and Crown in the Poultry,
near Cheapside.

I. **T**HE Scripture Chronology demonstrated by astronomical Calculations, and also by the Year of Jubilee, and the Sabbatical Year among the Jews : Or an Account of Time from the Creation of the World to the destruction of Jerusalem ; as it may be proved from the Old and New Testament. In a method hitherto unattempted, and which was first proposed by the learned Archbishop Usher. In which the Hebrew Text is vindicated ; and the Objections against it, as consisting of many Mutilations, and numerical Alterations, are occasionally consider'd, and the Authority of the Samaritan and Septuagint Versions, in opposition to the original Copy, is confuted. Together with the History of the World, from the Creation to the Time when Dr. Prideaux began his Connexion. Illustrated with great variety of Tables, Maps, and Copper-Plates. By ARTHUR BEDFORD, M. A. Rector of Newton St. Loe in the County of Somersfet, and Chaplain to the Haberdashers Hospital at Hoxton, near London. Fol.

II. The History of the Council of Constance, by JAMES LENFANT. Translated from the new Edition printed at Amsterdam 1727, which the Author has not only revised and corrected, but considerably augmented. Illustrated with twenty curious Copper Plates. In 2 Vol. 4to.

III. The Works of Dr. John Tillotson, late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. 3 Vol. Folio.

IV. The Works of Dr. Isaac Barrow. 2 Vol. Folio.